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INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3531
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 9744
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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0039
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0011
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0021
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 3754
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2030
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0127
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0701
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0886
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 002112

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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS HOLD PRESS CONFERENCE ON
ELECTION

REF: TASHKENT 1751

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On December 12, poloff attended a press conference on the election organized by the Human Rights Alliance. Unlike the Alliance's last press conference on the election in October (reftel), the event was only briefly interrupted by a single provocateur. The lack of a serious disturbance this time around might have been due to the presence of OSCE election monitors and a desire to make the election look more democratic. Human rights activists who attended events at the Embassy and EMR on Human Rights Day (December 10) also reported a relative decline in government efforts to interfere in such participation. End summary.

HUMAN RIGHTS ALLIANCE HOLDS SECOND PRESS CONFERENCE ON
ELECTION

¶2. (C) On December 12, poloff attended another press conference on the election organized by the Human Rights Alliance. Three of the five Alliance activists running as self-proclaimed candidates for president initially spoke at the event. Once again, they criticized President Karimov's political and economic policies, as well as onerous presidential candidate registration requirements stipulating that individuals must collect approximately 700,000 signatures to be added to the ballot. Alliance member Ahtam Shaymardanov added that he had met with representatives of the Central Election Committee (CEC), who refused to show him signatures collected by the official four candidates running for president. Shaymardanov estimated that several tons of paper would be required for all the signatures and noted that the CEC, which officially resides within Parliament, does not have the adequate office space or staff to verify the signatures within a seven-day period, as stipulated by Uzbek law (according to Shaymardanov). Alliance member Abdillo Tojiboy also criticized the Supreme Court for failing to

respond to letters submitted by the Alliance calling into question President Karimov's legal right to stand for a third term.

OSCE ELECTION MONITORS ATTEND

13. (C) The event was lightly attended by diplomats from the French and Latvian Embassies, a few journalists from independent websites, and two members of the OSCE's electoral monitoring mission. Poloff had earlier informed OSCE monitor Mats Lindberg about the event and suggested that some of OSCE's monitors attend. Upon Lindberg's request, poloff also provided him with a list of human rights activists and political opposition figures that the OSCE team could contact.

CANDIDATE SHOSALIMOV MAKES EVENT THIS TIME, ALBEIT BRIEFLY

14. (C) Jakhongir Shosalimov, a fourth "presidential candidate" from the Alliance who was reportedly detained by police and prevented from attending the last press conference in October, made a short appearance midway through the event. Shortly after he spoke, his wife, who has criticized his candidacy and interrupted Alliance events before, appeared outside and began banging on the venue's doors for a minute or two until Jakhongir went outside to talk to her. (Comment: The brief "disturbance" was half-hearted at best, and Poloff could not help but wonder whether this little bit of political theatre might have been arranged by the Alliance itself for the benefit of the diplomats and OSCE observers in attendance. End comment.)

PRESS CONFERENCE CLOSELY MONITORED

15. (C) According to the Embassy's driver, who was waiting outside, the press conference was watched closely by nine individuals, presumably National Security Service (NSS) officers. Five of them were standing in the street and another four were sitting in a car nearby. Several of them had video cameras and were carefully videotaping anyone entering the building. Poloff himself did not notice the men when entering or leaving the office.

COMMENT

16. (C) The lack of a serious disturbance at the Human Rights Alliance's press conference this time around is a potentially positive development, though authorities may have wished to avoid staging a major provocation in front of OSCE monitors. In the run-up to December 23, the government may be trying to put forward a more positive image to minimize outside criticism of the electoral process. This was reflected in what human right activists told us was a relative decline in efforts by the authorities to interfere with their participation in Embassy Human Rights Day events (septel).
NORLAND